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Portsmouth-As others have seen it

PART II 1790-1900

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Issue No. 20 November 1973

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Cover illustration: Platform, near Square Tower, showing the old semaphore.

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PORTSMOUTH - AS OTHERS HAVE SEEN IT

Part II 1790-1900

Margaret J. Hoad, MA

'Portsmouth has undoubtedly suffered much from the various and false reports propagated by people, either totally unacquainted with it, or blinded by a prejudice equally unpardonable. It has been represented as a sickly, damp, aguish and altogether unwholesome spot; whereas, on the contrary, its inhabitants are living proofs that it is unexceptionably one of the healthiest towns in all England. Its air is salubrious – its ground fertile – and its contiguity to the sea renders it alike favourable to health, commerce, or recreation.'

'The pureness of the water, from the rapid flowing and ebbing of the tide, and the fine gravelly bottom of the beach (there being neither mud or sand) cannot be surpassed.'

'Though the town is old, most of the houses are new, elegantly rebuilt, and many of them are appropriated for lodgings on account of the great resort here in the summer season. The markets are plentifully supplied with good butcher's meat, poultry of all sorts, fish, eggs, butter, bacons, etc.; and remarkably large quantities of the best vegetables, which no town in England can boast of superior. Though provisions are much advanced in price of late years, they are as reasonable here, if not more so, than in any other place at an equal distance from the capital. There are four elegant inns, viz: the Fountain, George, Crown and King's Arms, and a very good coffee house, on the Grand Parade, called the Parade Coffee House... Perhaps no town in England can boast of better conducted inns.'

Such is the picture of Portsmouth as painted by two Guide Books of 1790 and 1822. Naturally guide books aim to give the best impression possible, but much of what these go on to describe is often backed up by the comments of visitors. By the end of the eighteenth century Portsmouth had indeed grown considerably in size and was becoming more prosperous. The numerous wars of the period had fostered this and brought many more people to the town both as residents and visitors. Naturally most of these were connected with the army and navy but apart from memoirs written years afterwards, it has not been possible so far to find any contemporary account by any member of these two services. Such diaries as they kept, as for instance, those of Charles and Francis Austen, the naval brothers of the novelist Jane Austen, who both lived for a while in Portsmouth, have only brief entries referring mainly to the people they met and give no detailed account of the places they visited. Until about the 1820's the visitors who did make detailed descriptions continued to be mainly those who wrote with an eye to publication from the start. Although travel by road had greatly improved, journeys were still considered an adventure and were not lightly undertaken. Gradually as the nineteenth century advanced the number of visitors for pleasure increased, but not until the steam packet and the railways were well established (and the railway did not reach Portsmouth itself till 1847) did the visitors begin to come in ever greater numbers and their accounts become more personal and, in the first instance, private.

It is of interest to note that throughout this period what appealed most to visitors was the *Victory* and the work carried on in the Dockyard and not so much the attractions of the other entertainments provided on the front and in the town. Although in the eighteenth century a bathing house had been built on Point[1] and there was a theatre in the High Street, Portsmouth did not really begin to attract as a seaside holiday resort till after the Napoleonic Wars, the first sign of this being the building in 1816 of the Promenade Rooms near what was to become the Clarence Pier. One thing frequently taken for granted was the fortifications of Portsmouth and the active guard maintained on them, though such a situation was to be found in no other town in England at that time. These fortifications round the old town of Portsmouth and round Portsea by the Dockyard compelled each to be a separate community with its own shopping centre. Any expansion therefore had to come outside the walls and this came first in the two areas known as Landport and Southsea. Thus by 1896 a Guide Book could say: 'Portsea Island is divided up into districts, each of which has a special character of its own. In old naval phraseology Chatham and Rochester were "the two towns"; Plymouth, Devonport and Stonehouse were "the three towns"; while Portsea, Portsmouth, Landport and Southsea were known as "the four towns".'

The extracts which follow are, as in the previous paper on this subject, confined to accounts written at the time of the visit.

The first and one of the most notable was written by *Thomas Pennant*, the antiquary and naturalist, who made a journey through the south of England to the Isle of Wight in 1793 just before the outbreak of the Napoleonic Wars. He approached by way of

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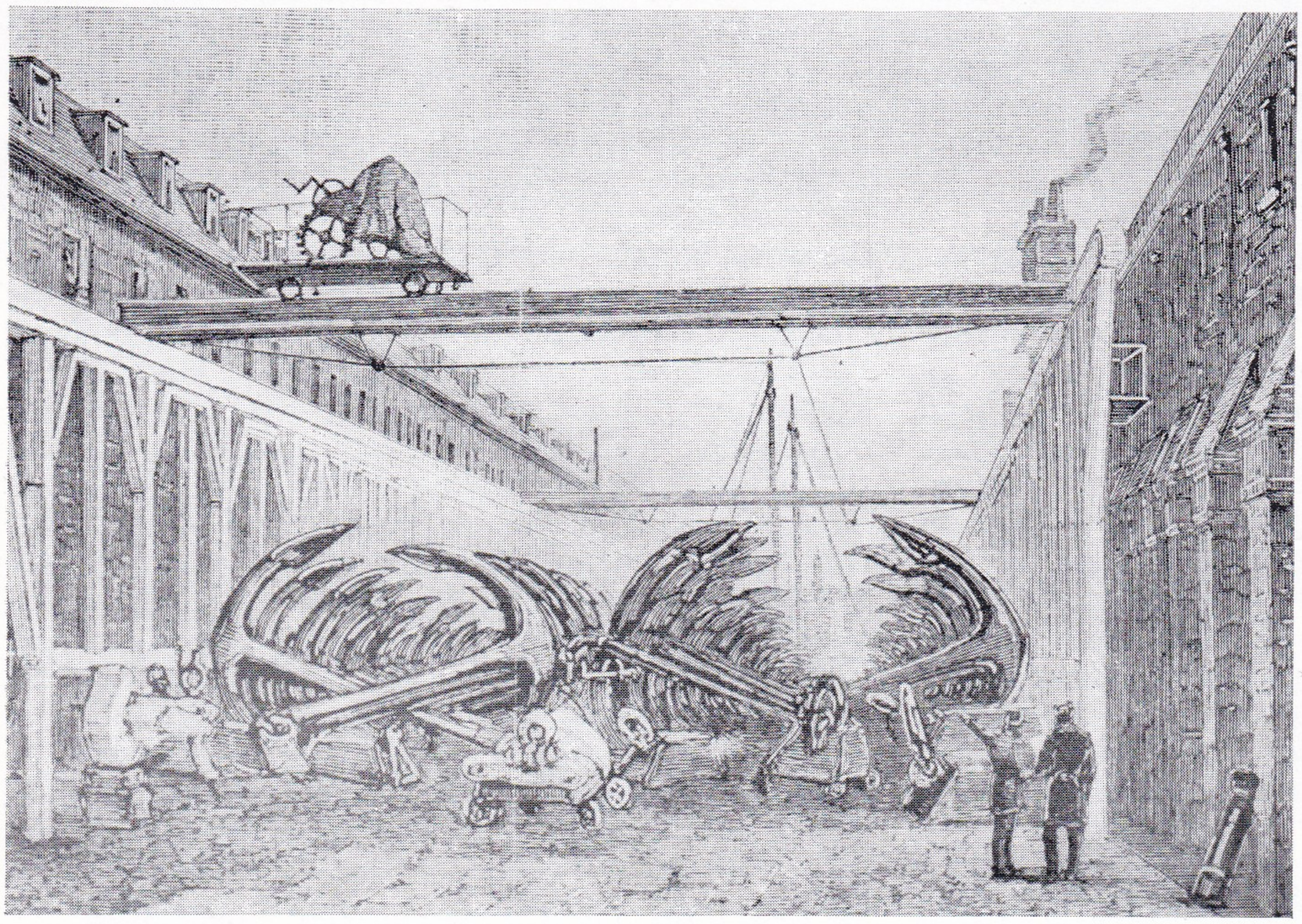
[1] Now Quebec House.

The George Inn, High Street, Old Portsmouth. From a sketch by M. Snape.



Anchor Lane in Portsmouth Dockyard in the nineteenth century.

Havant and is one of the few people who disliked the view he saw from the top of Portsdown Hill.

> 'We ascended Portsdown, a narrow lofty range extending six miles from east to west: the upper part consists of chalk broken into by vast pits; the lower part turns into a brown loam; on the top is a great tumulus. The hill is loudly celebrated for its view, and our ideas were highly raised by the several eulogies we heard of its beauty and grandeur.'

He then described the extensive view to the north before turning to look seawards.

> 'Beneath us lay the flat dreary Isle of Portsea, with Portsmouth at its end. Its noble harbour filled with ships of war, at this peaceful time laid up, yet divested as they were of their terrific apparatus, could not fail of striking us with admiration. . . . Here only the sublimity of the scene appeared to us; but every thing else which could please the eye . . . vanished; . . . Let us turn towards the west;[1] the prospect is most horribly disgusting: a great extent of shallow estuary stretches from Portsea Isle quite to the county of Sussex, at low water presenting an extensive tract of mud, divided by a few channels, or at high water covered with a thick embrowned tide. Two flat, low, naked and dreary islands occupy part of this little sluggish

[1] Pennant should have said 'east'.

sea. Haling is the largest, Thorney is the next, and each have their church. Channels point up the intervening spaces as high as the main land, and facilitate the commerce of the country by vessels of small burden.

'We descended into the Isle of Portsea, and in a short time reached the lines; passed by Portbridge-battery, and crossed, on a drawbridge, the narrow water which insulates the island; then by Hilsea barracks, and through a series of villages of recent growth, which will soon unite and form a large town; after which we crossed two other draw-bridges, and, passing through a gate, entered the town of Portsmouth . . . The present fortifications of Portsmouth totally prevent any increase in size. It is inferior in that respect to the town called the Common [i.e. Portsea]. The streets are broad and tolerably built: the market-house divides the high street. . . .

'The ramparts are planted with trees, and form a most beautiful walk; many of the cannons were dismounted, the town seemed almost dispeopled, and every thing at this time indicated the fulness of peace.

'The town is defended on the land-side by the fortifications made of late years, at vast expence, which also include the dock.[1] . . .

'The Governor's house is an ordinary building, and, I think, stands on the site of that which was called the King's.[2] The other public buildings are, a great brew-house,[3] a slaughter-house,[4] victualling-house,[5] and the old barracks.[6] . . .

'The ramparts are discontinued along the water-side, where the old walls still remain. On one part is a good head of Charles I (when Prince of Wales,) with long hair, within an oval; the date April 3, 1623, the year in which he embarked at this port on his romantic journey into Spain.[7]

'The church[8] has nothing remarkable, except the monument of the Duke of Buckingham, (an immense profusion of adulatory marble,) "shouldering God's altar", or, more properly, jostling it out of its place. It is only a cœnotaph, for his body was buried in Westminster abbey.

'The docks and yards are close to the north side of the town, but entirely independent of, and rigidly secluded from it. The Commissioner's house is very large and handsome; it was at this time occupied by Henry Martin esq. from whom we received every attention. The place for the making of anchors was truly a giant's cave: seventy or eighty brawny fellows were amidst the fires busied in fabricating those securities to our shipping. Near this building was the faultless anchor of the unfortunate *Royal George*, which had been weighed up.[9] Had it been put to the fullest trial, I dare say it would have vindicated the motto it bore: "Fear not; I will hold you fast."

'The rope-walk is not less than eight hundred and seventy feet long. The making a great cable is a wonderful sight; a hundred men are required for the purpose, and the labour is so hard that they cannot work at it more than four hours in the day. . . .

'This precinct contains every thing which our Navy can want. The vastness of the magazines can scarcely be conceived.'

After this tour of the Dockyard, 'the Commissioner, with great politeness directed that his barge should be ready to convey us up the harbour. . . .

This harbour may boast of being capable of receiving the whole Navy of England. Secure from every storm, the greatest first-rates may ride there at the lowest ebbs without touching ground: they can take in their stores and guns while they are at anchor, and get out of harbour in a quarter of an hour's time, without impediments of bars or sandbanks, in the deep water beneath Southsea Castle. The approach to the harbour is said to be impregnable, by reason of the various forts or batteries close to the water-edge. On the Gosport side are Charles-fort, James-fort, Borough-fort, Block-house-fort, and another lately erected in Stokesbay. Monkton-fort, on the point next to Stokesbay, I think had once the name of Kicker-gill, or Gill-kicker, (I do not know which); . . .'

Thomas Pennant then named some of the ships he saw, including HMS *Victory* which was to be Nelson's flagship at the Battle of Trafalgar. 'After we had satisfied our curiosity with the shipping we directed

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[1] These fortifications begun about 1770.
[2] Domus Dei.
[3] This is probably the brewery and cooperage in St. Nicholas Street which by this date had been rebuilt as barracks for the Royal Marines. The brewery had been transferred to Weovil, later Clarence Victualling Yard, Gosport, in 1765.
[4] Alongside Square Tower.
[5] In King St. near the quay.
[6] Fourhouse Barracks in St. Nicholas Street, rebuilt about 1770.
[7] On Square Tower at bottom of High Street. Charles' mission to marry a Spanish princess was fruitless.
[8] St. Thomas's Church.
[9] Sank at Spithead, August 1782, with great loss of life.

our sailors to land at Portchester' whose castle and church he described in some detail.

'We returned to Portsmouth, and from thence crossed the entrance into the harbour to Gosport. The channel is about as broad as the Thames at Westminster . . . For the better security of the entrance "a mighty chaine of iren, to draw from tourre to tourre", mentioned by Leland, is still ready at the bottom of the channel to be drawn up by way of boom, in case of any hostile attempt . . .

'The town of Gosport is at present swelled to a vast size, and is extremely populous and opulent. Its inhabitants consist of people in trade, and who furnish the sailors with all kinds of necessaries, besides various supplies to the fleet on the public account. Its church is no more than a chapel of ease to Stoke or Alverstoke, the parish adjacent on the south.'

Pennant ended his visit by going to Haslar Hospital which he says 'is a vast plain building, or rather several ranges of buildings capable of receiving between two and three thousand patients; but at this time had no more than one hundred and fifty.'

The next day 'on May 16th, in the morning, I embarked from Portsmouth in a Cowes packet, and in a most turbulent sea left.'

Little more than a year later another visitor of note was drawn to Portsmouth. War with France had broken out shortly after Pennant's visit, and now in July 1794 *Joseph Haydn*, the Austrian musician and composer, being on a visit at the time to London and having seen there the amazing scenes of excitement which greeted Lord Howe's naval victory of the Glorious First of June, determined to come down to Portsmouth to see for himself the captured French prizes which Howe had brought in. Haydn kept notebooks written in German in which this visit is recorded and it is clear that he had little knowledge of either the sea or ships.

'On July 9th, I left [London] at 5 o'clock in the morning for Portsmouth, 72 miles [away], and arrived there at 8 o'clock in the evening. Some small earthworks were thrown up 14 miles before Portsmouth;[1] nearby is a small camp of 800 men;[2] one mile further, in the direction of the city, some 3,500 Frenchmen are quartered in barracks.[3] I inspected the fortifications there, which are in good repair, especially the fortress opposite, in Gosport, which the "gubernism" [i.e. governors] had had constructed recently. I went aboard the French ship-of-the-line called *le just*; it has 80 cannon; the English, or rather Lord Howe, captured it. The 18 cannon in the harbour fortress are 36-pounders. The ship is terribly shot to pieces. The great mast, which is 10 feet 5 inches in circumference, was cut off at the very bottom and lay stretched on the ground. A single cannon-ball, which passed through the captain's room killed 14 sailors. . . .

'The Dockyard, or the place where ships are built, is of an enormous size, and has a great many splendid buildings. But I couldn't go there, because I was a foreigner. Hard by is a new and most splendid ship-of-the-line with 110 cannon called the *Prince of Wales*. The King and his family stayed 3 days in the Dockyard at the "gouverneur's" house' about a fortnight before Haydn's visit.

He also gave the following curious notes on naval ships.

'Every ship-of-the-line, or man-of-war, has 3 masts, likewise a Frigate.

Most of them have 3 decks.

A Brig has 2 masts.

A Cutter has only 1 mast.

Every ship-of-the-line must have at least 64 cannon.

A Cutter has but 14, at the most 16 cannon.

A fire-ship has 2 masts. In the middle of its sails it has 2 large and long cross beams with round, pointed double irons:

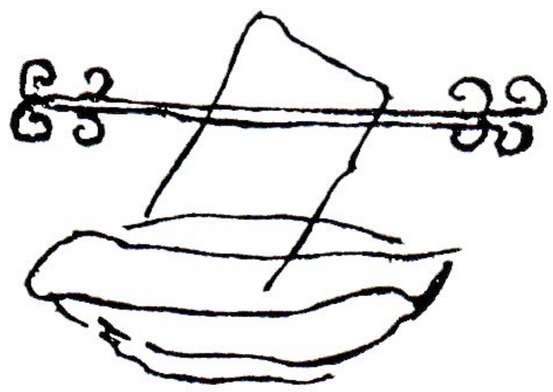


Illustration from Haydn's original notebook.

[1] This must be an error for 4 miles, as he is referring here to Hilsea Lines at Portscreek.

[2] Hilsea Barracks.

[3] There was no prisoner of war camp on Portsea Island. This may be a reference to the Sappers' Barracks at Landport.

Portsmouth Point – an etching by Thomas Rowlandson in the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.

When they came near an enemy ship, this iron grapples the rigging or even the sails, whereupon one sets the ship on fire so that the other ship which is grappled to it has to burn, too. The crew saves itself in the little lifeboats which they take with them . . .

A cockswan [sic] is a kind of subaltern who, when his Capitain [sic] goes to sea, stands at attention next to him. A capitain generally has his special crew, all identically dressed, which he takes with him to his port. At 12 o'clock I was in the neighbourhood of the fleet when the 12 o'clock bells were rung.'

It is not clear how long Haydn stayed in Portsmouth but *Dr. George Pinckard* spent some time here in the autumn of 1795 while waiting for the departure of Sir Ralph Abercrombie's expedition to the West Indies and left a most vivid description of the people of Portsmouth and the way some of them lived. He says:

'Portsmouth verifies to our experience all that we had heard of its unpleasantness and vulgar immorality. The great objects which call forth the attention of strangers are the Dockyard, the Haslar Hospital, and the fine walk upon the ramparts. All these we have visited, likewise Southdown Castle[1] and the Forton and Portchester prisons;[2] nor have we neglected that new modern messenger, the telegraph, by which intelligence can be conveyed from this place to the Admiralty at Charing Cross in the short space of ten minutes.[3]

'Having thus exhausted all the novelty of the town and its environs, it only remains for us to lapse into the dull round of the place. It is said that in days of peace long grass grows upon the streets. In time of war they are more trodden; but, even then, the busy activity of the place occurs only at intervals, as when a fleet comes in or is about to sail, at which periods the town becomes all crowd and hurry for a few days, and then suddenly reverts to a languid intermission of dullness and inactivity. The rent of houses and apartments, the price of provisions, etc., differ very much in times of peace and of war. Indeed, we are told that the houses, and lodgings, have their war price, and their peace price, distinctly fixed. . . .

'In respect to streets, houses, markets, and traffic, Portsmouth is not unlike other towns, but Portsmouth-point, Portsea-common, and some other parts of the town have peculiarities which seem to sanction the celebrity the place has acquired. In some quarters Portsmouth is not only filthy, and crowded, but crowded with a class of low and abandoned beings, who seem to have declared open war against every habit of common decency and decorum. . . . The riotous, drunken, and immoral scenes of this place, perhaps, exceed all others. Commonly gross obscenity and intoxication

[1] Southsea Castle.
[2] French prisoner of war camps.
[3] Semaphore Station first built near present Clarence Pier in 1795.

preserve enough of diffidence to seek the concealment of night . . . but here hordes of profligate females are seen reeling in drunkenness, or plying upon the streets in open day with a broad immodesty which puts the great orb of noon to the blush. . . .

'To form to yourself an idea of these tender, languishing nymphs, these lovely, fighting ornaments of the fair sex, imagine a something of more than Amazonian stature, having a crimson countenance, emblazoned with all the effrontery of Cyprian confidence and broad Bacchanalian folly; give to her bold countenance the warlike features of two wounded cheeks, a tumid nose, scarred and battered brows, and a pair of blackened eyes, with balls of red; then add to her sides a pair of brawny arms, fit to encounter a Colossus, and set her upon two ankles like the fixed supporters of a gate. Afterwards, by way of apparel, put upon her a loose flying cap, a man's black hat, a torn neckerchief, stone rings on her fingers, and a dirty white, or tawdry flowered gown, with short apron, and a pink petticoat; and thus will you have something very like the figure of a "Portsmouth Poll".

'Callous to every sense of shame, these daring objects reel about the streets, lie in wait at the corners, or, like the devouring Kite, hover over every landing place, eager to pounce upon their prey; and each unhappy tar, who has the misfortune to fall under their talons, has no hope of escape till plucked of every feather. The instant he sets foot on dry land he is embraced by the neck, hugged round the waist, or hooked in the arm by one or more of these tender Dulcineas; and thus poor Jack, with pockets full of prize money, or rich with the wages of a long and dangerous cruise, is, instantly, dragged (though, it must be confessed, not always against his consent) to a bagnio, or some filthy pot-house, where he is kept drinking, smoking, singing, dancing, swearing, and rioting, amidst one continual scene of debauchery, all day and all night, and all night and all day, until his every farthing is gone. He is then left to sleep till he is sober, and awakes to return, pennyless, to his ship, with much cause to think himself fortunate if an empty purse be the worst consequence of his long wished for ramble ashore.'

After referring in some detail to the places he visited, Pinckard then described the scene immediately before the sailing of Abercrombie's expedition.

'We left Portsmouth in a grand scene of hurry and confusion in consequence of it being reported, on the arrival of the fleet from the Downs, that every ship belonging to the expedition was to sail without further delay. The transports with troops from Southampton happening to drop down the river at the same time to rendezvous at the Mother-bank and Spithead seemed to confirm the report, and suddenly all was converted into extreme hurry and activity. Multitudes both from the newly arrived ships and those which had been long waiting thronged on shore to purchase provisions and stores to complete their stock for the voyage. Many who had passed their hours of suspense in the town had also their marketings to make; and hence the demand becoming suddenly greater than the supply it introduced all the confusion of a general scramble. Each seized upon whatever provisions he could find, asking no questions, but paying any money that was demanded.

'All the butchers and bakers' shops were quickly emptied. Not a loaf, nor a bit of meat, not even a carrot nor a cabbage remained, and many went empty away. Neither porters nor servants were required, but everyone who was successful enough to put his hand upon any provisions gladly became the bearer of his own load. To show the extremity to which we were reduced I may tell you that our party stopped a man upon the street who was carrying home a large giblet pie, hot from the oven, which we tempted him to let us take on board, by offering for the pie and the dish more than double their value – or indeed any money he might demand. . . .

'From the multitudes of anxious heavily-laden individuals who were seen running with their burdens down to the boats, and scrambling to embark, it might have appeared to a stranger that the inhabitants of Portsmouth were making one great effort to carry off all the provisions, stores, and furniture of the town, previous to evacuating it to the possession of an enemy. One hurried off with legs and shoulders of mutton, another with half a sheep, a third with a huge piece of beef, and others with different joints of veal or pork. Here was a man running with a cheese, there one with a sugar-loaf. Others were scampering away loaded with rice or papers of groceries. Some ran off with bags of bread, some with baskets of greens, potatoes, carrots, turnips, and the like. Many were seen bending under heavy bundles of clothes wet from the wash; others loaded with camp stools, deal boxes, sea-coffers, pewter utensils, and various other kinds of stores; and, amidst the throng,

ourselves with the smoking giblet pie, and such other provisions as we had been able to procure. Everyone was upon the alert. Necessity made all industrious.'

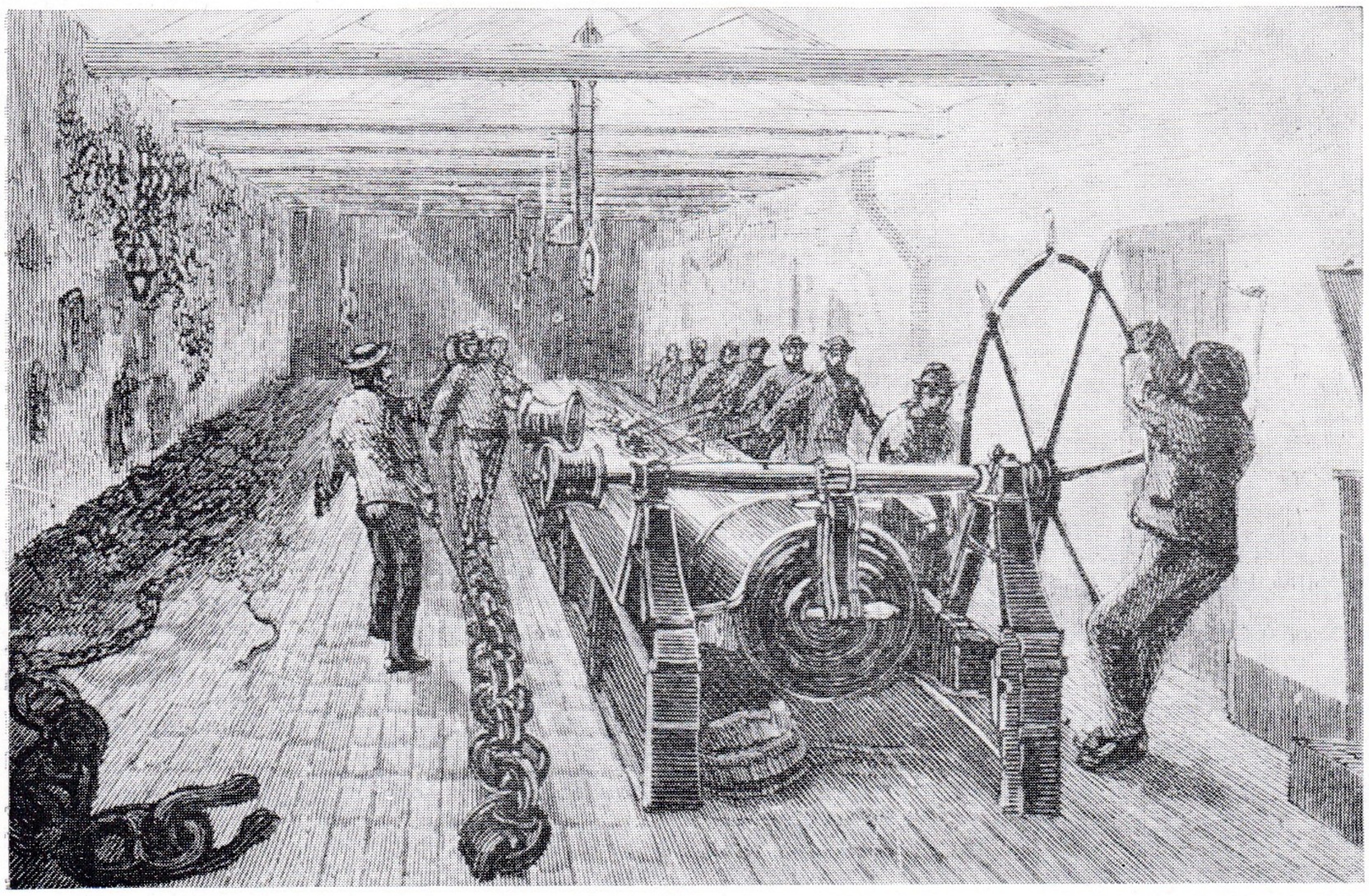
The general crowd and confusion was increased by 'multitudes pressing into and overflowing the shops; people running against or tumbling over each other upon the streets; loud disputes and quarrelling; the sadness of parting; greetings of friends unexpectedly met and as suddenly about to separate; sailors quitting their trolls; drunkards reeling; boatmen wrangling; boats overloaded or upset; the tide beating in heavy spray upon the shore; persons running and hurrying in every direction for something new or something forgot; some cursing the boatmen for not pushing off with more speed, and others beseeching and imploring them to stop a minute longer.'

'Such was the state in which we left Portsmouth, after a residence of three weeks.'

Little more than ten years later, with the war still in progress, conditions in Portsmouth had altered little, as can be seen from this account written by an *unnamed person* who visited the town in 1807 during the course of a tour of the western counties of England, the journal of which he later published.

> 'After passing an uncomfortable night at the Dolphin, a bad and dear inn in Ryde, I was rowed over to Portsmouth in about two hours, in an open passage-boat.
>
> 'The excursion was highly interesting; the objects which attracted attention being well calculated to swell the heart of a British subject. We passed between many men of war, and large transport vessels, known by having, instead of names, large numbers painted on their sterns. On the coast were the strong fortifications of Portsmouth, and its harbour crowded with shipping; while on the Gosport side stood that magnificent evidence of the care of a generous country for those who fight her battles – Haslar-hospital. . . .
>
> 'The town [of Portsmouth] is low, and aguish; the streets uncleanly, and in many places wretched; but from the constant resort of seamen, a busy scene is presented. You meet companies of three or four sailors, each with his trull under his arm, whom he has decked out in flaring ribbons, and with whom he posts up and down the streets without any apparent object, from morning till night. At the crossing, if you are not upon your guard, you are in imminent peril of being run over by a midshipman driving a blind horse in a crazy jingling gig, as furiously as Jehu. These gentlemen come ashore, and get rid of their money by fatiguing the miserable brutes up one street and down another at half-a-crown an hour. Sometimes a low alehouse presents itself, with a *pas de deux* between Jack and a Portsmouth Parisot, in the vestibule, to the elegant strains of two blind fiddlers. But the most entertaining scene of all is found in the coffee-houses, where every table is covered with fierce cocked hats and hangers; and where every five minutes you hear – "Waiter! get me a beef-steak; and bear a hand."
>
> 'Soon after my arrival, I walked towards the dock-yards, and stood some time admiring the construction of a piece of machinery in the harbour, formed for clearing away the mud. Two vessels lie close together, and in one a circular chain revolves by means of steam, each link having iron buckets, so sharp and narrow at the edge, as to scoop up a quantity of mud at every descent; and carrying this to the top of their ascent, they deposit it, on revolving, in a long wooden channel placed obliquely, and reaching to the other boat, into which of course the mud slides of itself. Hiring a boat, I was put alongside the *Bulwark*, a new ship of seventy-four guns; and the officer on duty very politely conducted me through every part of it. . . . Close to this ship lay the *Temeraire*,[1] so much shattered in the action of Trafalgar.
>
> 'After coming ashore, and waiting a considerable time, I obtained admission to the dock-yards: a depot of naval stores, truly calculated to impress every visitor with an idea of the power and grandeur of the first maritime nation in the world. The first object of attention, on entering, is the mast-house, where masts of all sizes are ranged in regular order; and some of them being grazed with balls, are suspended as trophies of naval victories. The rope-house above is nearly a quarter of a mile long. Some of the cables require 100 men to work them, whose labour is so hard, that it seldom exceeds four hours a day. Near to this is a quay for laying up the cannon.

[1] The *Téméraire*'s French name was due to the fact that, like a number of other ships in the British Navy, she was originally French and had been captured and taken into the Navy under her original name. At Trafalgar she had smashed through the French line immediately astern of the *Victory*, fighting six French ships on her way, fallen aboard of the French *Rédoubtable*, battered her to a hulk and taken her.



Chain testing room in Portsmouth Dockyard in the nineteenth century.

'A number of convicts from the hulks which lie in the harbour, were at work, in chains: they were making a shew of pulling a cable; but the progression of their labour was very imperceptible; and indeed it is matter of wonder how they can be brought to work at all; since I was informed, though I think the guide must be mistaken, that there are neither any indulgences for labour, nor any punishments for indolence. Others of them came about the party begging, or selling small wares manufactured from bone. The guide warned us to take care of our pockets; and said that the last week one of them stole a purse from a lady; and upon being challenged with the theft, boldly demanded that he might be searched; but the guide pushing him back, removed his foot from its place, and disclosed the property, which he had covered with it. There is here a very old convict who has been twice transported for fourteen years, exclusive of his present term in the hulks, of which he has only four years to run. The next object, and a wonderful one, is the block manufactory, where machinery of the most ingenious invention, saws, chips, and shapes the block, drives the hole in the centre, even polishes the iron and brass work; in a word, performs every operation but that of the last polish, which is given by the hand. We were then led into the anchor-forge. . . .

'The continued and copious waste of perspiration, occasioned by violent labour, and exposure to the intense heat of the furnaces, requires [the men] to be supplied with five pints of small beer, and with three pints and a half of strong beer daily, which, with wages of 29s. per week, form a sufficient inducement to these Cyclops to abridge their life, and to live in this emblem of Tartarus for sixteen hours every day. The copper work is done by the piece; and the men who undertake it work less, no drink being allowed them.

'The tour of the dock-yards leads from the anchor-forge to the store-house for boats; and from thence we pass long lines of noble dwellings, built for the governor and all the principal officers. There is also a commodious chapel. A thousand men at least are said to be employed about these dock-yards, which resemble a town, and cannot be visited by a hasty inspection in less than two hours.

'On the beach at Portsmouth there are bathing-machines; but the bathing is very uncomfortable, owing to the quantity of sea-weed in which one gets entangled.'

The account ends thus abruptly, for the next day this unknown writer went on by stages to Salisbury. As a postscript he adds

> 'I forgot to mention, that the Crown at Portsmouth is excessively dear; but I believe all the other inns are liable to the same objection. The inn at Titchfield is cheap and good.'

After the war, when the excitement and bustle of the arrival and departure of ships had died away, one finds *William Cobbett* rejoicing in the difficult times which followed for Portsmouth as he believed that towns in general battened on the countryside around them.

> 'Those scenes of glorious loyalty, the sea-port places, are beginning to be deserted. How many villages has that scene of all that is wicked and odious, Portsmouth, Gosport, and Portsea; how many villages has that hellish assemblage beggared! It is now being scattered itself! Houses which there let for forty or fifty pounds a year each, now let for three or four shillings a week each.'

Cobbett, following his policy of avoiding large towns, never came to Portsmouth but during the course of his *Rural Rides* he did pass along Portsdown in 1823.

> 'Now I come to one of the great objects of my journey: that is to say, to see the state of the corn

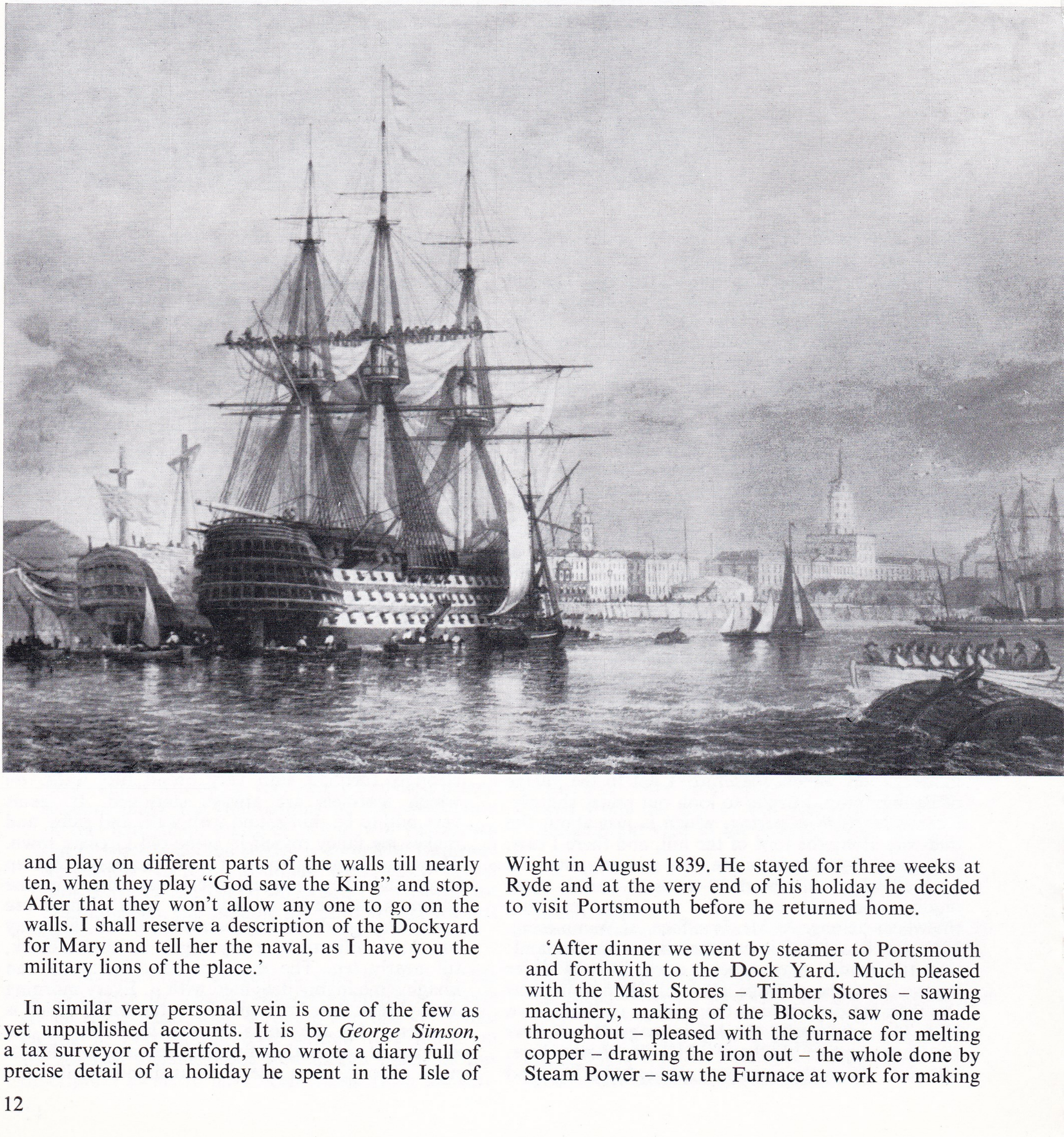
View of the ramparts looking towards the Square Tower.

along the south foot and on the south side of Portsdown Hill. It is impossible that there can be, anywhere, a better corn country than this. The hill is eight miles long, and about three-fourths of a mile high, beginning at the road that runs along at the foot of the hill. On the hill-side the corn land goes rather better than half way up; and, on the sea-side, the corn land is about the third (it may be half) a mile wide. Portsdown Hill is very much in the shape of an oblong tin cover to a dish. From Bedhampton, which lies at the eastern end of the hill, to Fareham, which is at the western end of it, you have brought under your eye not less than eight square miles of corn fields, with scarcely a hedge or ditch of any consequence, and being, on an average, from twenty to forty acres each in extent. The land is excellent. The situation good for manure. The spot the earliest in the whole kingdom. Here, if the corn were backward, then the harvest must be backward. We were talking at Reigate of the prospect of a backward harvest. I observed that it was a rule that if no wheat were cut under Portsdown Hill on the hill fair-day, 26th July, the harvest must be generally backward. When I made this observation, the fair-day was passed; but I determined in my mind to come and see how the matter stood. When, therefore, I got to the village of Bedhampton, I began to look out pretty sharply. I came on to Wimmering, which is just about the mid-way along the foot of the hill, and there I saw, at a good distance from me, five men reaping in a field of wheat of about 40 acres. I found, upon inquiry, that they began this morning, and that the wheat belongs to Mr. Boniface, of Wimmering. Here the first sheaf is cut that is cut in England: that the reader may depend upon. It was never known that the average even of Hampshire was less than ten days behind the average of Portsdown Hill. The corn under the hill is as good as I ever saw it, except in the year 1813. No beans here. No peas. Scarcely any oats. Wheat, barley, and turnips. The swedish turnips not so good as on the South Downs and near Funtington; but the wheat full as good, rather better; and the barley as good as it is possible to be. In looking at these crops, one wonders whence are to come the hands to clear them off.'

In complete contrast comes the next extract. It is one of the first more intimate descriptions of Portsmouth originally never intended for publication and was written by *Henry Alford* who was later Dean of Canterbury. He came to Portsmouth on two summer vacations as a university student in order to get extra tuition in mathematics. In this letter dated 16 June 1829 to his cousin Fanny, who was later to become his wife, he gives one of the few descriptions of the military guard maintained here.

'I am now lodging in a place which is as it were the rendezvous of British naval preparation and strength. The country about Portsmouth is not pretty, there are no cliffs on the seashore, but the beach goes up quite in a flat; the three towns, Portsmouth, Portsea, and Southsea, are all situated on the island of Portsea, the water at high tide surrounds them all. Portsmouth and Portsea are strongly fortified with very broad turf walls, on which sentinels are always stationed. It seems very odd to be shut round with walls and gates, and makes me fancy myself in some old Grecian town. There is a large garrison of soldiers always kept up here, and they frequently exercise them on the common, which is a very fine sight. There are some very good military bands here, and they play on the fortifications every night at nine o'clock, till nearly ten. The music is very fine: you can imagine me highly delighted with it. Every morning at daybreak they fire a gun from the walls, which is answered by the ships in the harbour. In the evening at sunset they fire another, and another at nine o'clock, then the various bands strike up,

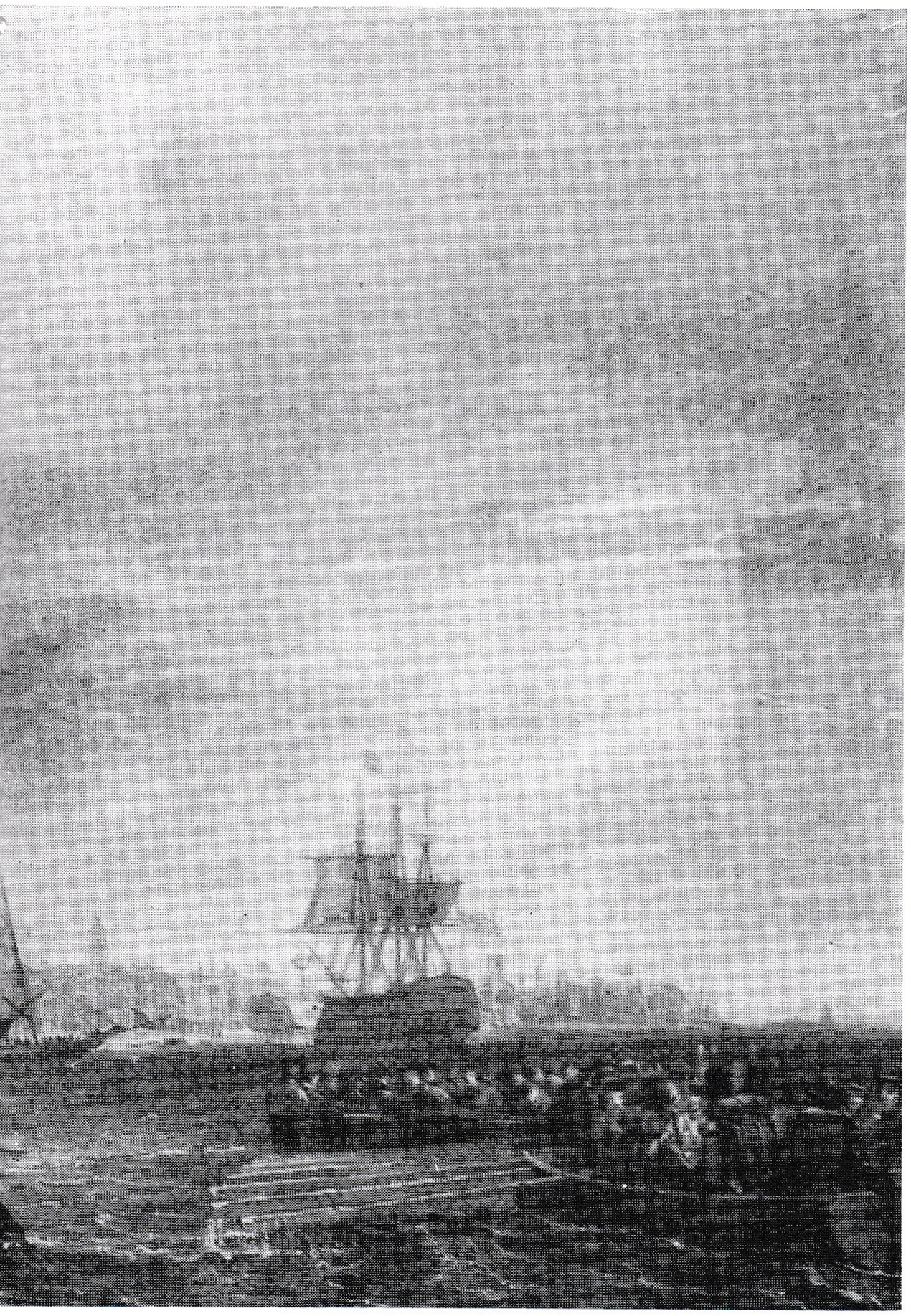
Portsmouth Harbour and Dockyard, c. 1853. On the left is the 'Duke of Wellington'; in the centre is the temporary Royal Yacht 'Fairy'; and on the right the 'Victory'.



and play on different parts of the walls till nearly ten, when they play "God save the King" and stop. After that they won't allow any one to go on the walls. I shall reserve a description of the Dockyard for Mary and tell her the naval, as I have you the military lions of the place.'

In similar very personal vein is one of the few as yet unpublished accounts. It is by *George Simson*, a tax surveyor of Hertford, who wrote a diary full of precise detail of a holiday he spent in the Isle of Wight in August 1839. He stayed for three weeks at Ryde and at the very end of his holiday he decided to visit Portsmouth before he returned home.

'After dinner we went by steamer to Portsmouth and forthwith to the Dock Yard. Much pleased with the Mast Stores – Timber Stores – sawing machinery, making of the Blocks, saw one made throughout – pleased with the furnace for melting copper – drawing the iron out – the whole done by Steam Power – saw the Furnace at work for making



anchors. Obliged to exert myself to check the hasty progress of a Gentleman of the Party, and reprove him for his expression in saying "The Ladies were a sad Drag upon us" – these Ladies being my wife and sister and two other Ladies. Went on board the *Queen*,[1] man of war, the greatest ship in the Navy – will carry 120 guns – had been launched about 3 months – now in dock, many men at work on board, roved all over and under it – having satisfied our curiosity we now returned by the Boat to the Point at Portsmouth. . . . Left Portsmouth by steamer, passed near where the *Royal George* lays – and which is to be blown up in a few days.[2]

The next day he 'started by myself, having turned out at 6, by steamer at 7 to Portsmouth – having landed crossed the Ferry to Gosport and proceeded to the Dolphin Inn where I breakfasted – went thence to the Victualling Office[3] arriving there the First that morning and while waiting for a Party to go round fell into conversation with the Sergeant of the Police, who turned out to be the last Centinel but one who kept watch over the Body of Lord Nelson on board the *Victory* which lay in sight at the time we were talking – his name is Staples – as we stood he shewed me the Gun or Port Hole where used to be his Berth – so that he sees his old quarters daily.

'A Party being now collected a Policeman proceeded to show us round. The Store Room for Beef and Pork is the largest of the kind in the Kingdom, being 325 feet long and 100 broad, it is supported [by] 60 iron Pillars, and a wall near the entrance, and will hold 15000 casks of Beef and Pork. The Store in it at present is but small. Passed the Well which was not shewn – stated to be 375 feet deep and 300 feet bore – saw subsequently the reservoir into which the water is pumped up by the Steam Engine. This great engine we now saw in full work – it is of 40 horse power, by it the water is pumpt, the wheat is unloaded from the Vessel, the wheat is ground, the flour dressed thro' its different processes, the flour kneaded, the dough rolled out, then moved by its machinery to be rolled the thickness for the Biscuits, the Biscuits made. All this I saw with wonder and astonishment. The Roller is half a ton weight. 76 Biscuits are made at a time and 5 tons in a day being sufficient for 100 bags of 1 cwt each. The Biscuits were being put in the oven and are baked in 15 minutes, saw some put in one oven and staid long enough to see some drawn out from another oven. The Master Baker attended and kindly broke up a Biscuit or two and gave each Person a piece all round. After the biscuits are baked they are carried

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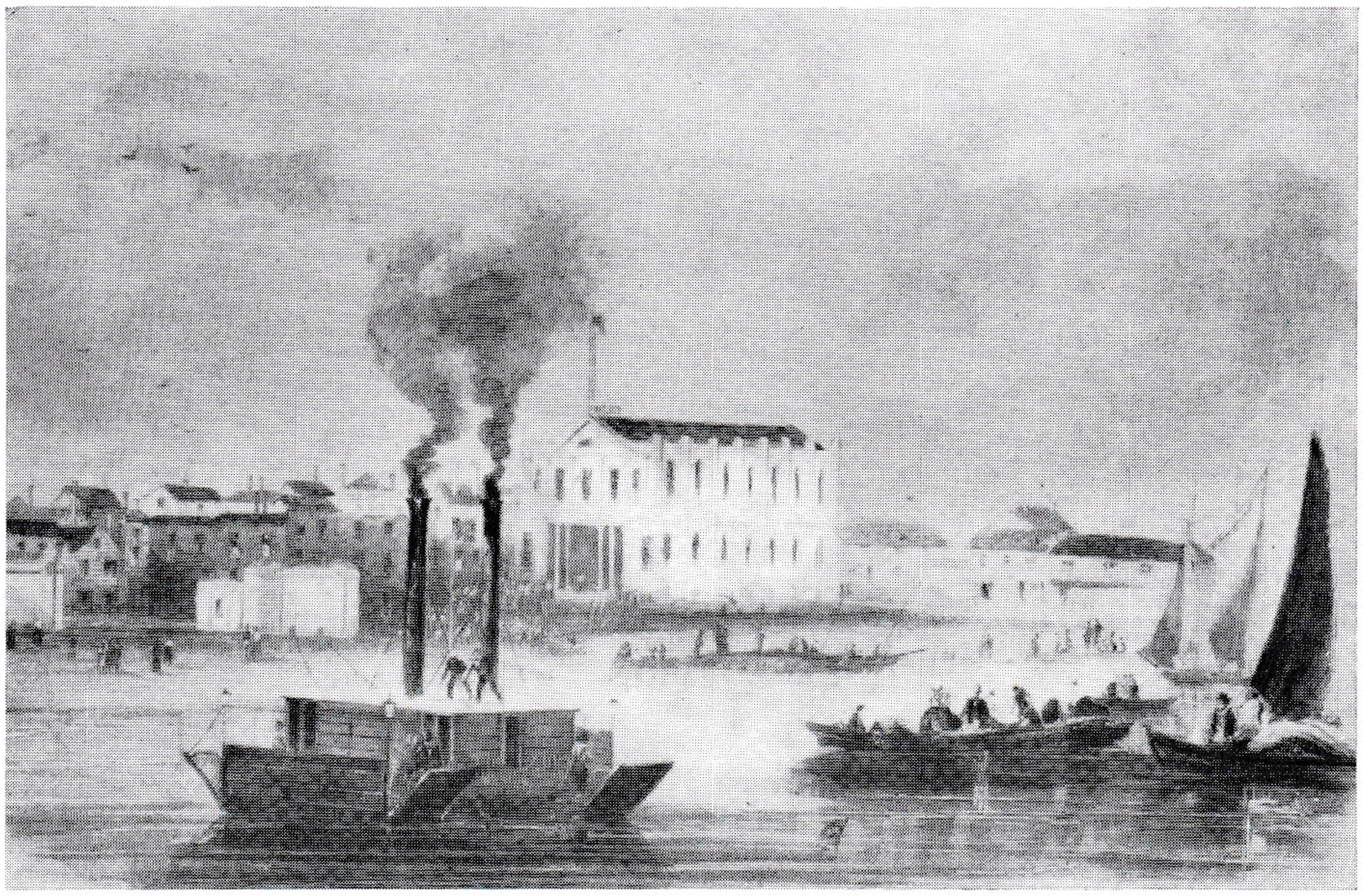
[1] Served in Crimean War. Fitted with engines 1859. Sold 1871.

[2] Salvage attempts were made in 1784 but thereafter *Royal George* left as obstruction to shipping. In 1836 John Dean, using his new diving apparatus, brought up some material, but in 1839 Col. Pasley organised its removal by means of gunpowder. His work took several months.

[3] Royal Clarence Victualling Office opened 1828 after transfer from Portsmouth.



The Portsmouth to Gosport Floating Bridge, c. 1850.

into the Store Room where they lay for 3 days and are then moved and lay I think 4 days longer is what was told us. There are ten Pair of Stones and can grind $5\frac{1}{2}$ [blank] per hour. There were 7 pair of Stones at work while I was there.

'The policeman was very ready in giving all the information and shewing the whole of what was going on by this immense Steam Engine. He opened the flap by which we saw the wheat when ground passing through 75 yards of wire and the other machinery for separating the Flour from the Bran. Shewed us to the top of the Building whence the wheat is put into the Hopper – saw the store of wheat which at this time was 700 quarters – and the Store room for Biscuits 300 feet by 60 feet and which will hold 30,000 bags. Left this place much pleased and could not help transgressing the orders given that no Fee or Gratuity was to be given to the Person who conducted us round.

'Returned through Gosport, crossed the Ferry, lunched at an Oyster Stall near the Point at Portsmouth. Interested myself at the work going on for a Floating Bridge[1] to cross the Water, similar to that at Southampton, much difficulty having arisen in consequence of the shingles being so deep that they cannot without a very heavy and unexpected expense make the foundations to the satisfaction of the Watermen, many of whom will be thrown out of work when the Bridge is complete. Returned by steamer[2] to Ryde to dinner after which we all took leave of the Island on board the steamer for Southampton, this making my third voyage for this day.'

An account very different in style is given a year or two later by *Thomas Roscoe*. Though it affects to be a personal tour through the Isle of Wight ending in Portsmouth, it is written very much on the lines of a guide book and indeed much of this description seems to have been copied from the contemporary Charpentier's *Guide to Portsmouth*. Only those parts have been included which most nearly approach originality.

'The view of Portsmouth from the water, on approaching it from the Isle of Wight, is striking and picturesque. The forest of sails, the grand roadstead extending into the distance off Spithead, the spacious harbour covered with lordly men-of-war; the fine open shore, the terraced bastions, bristling with arms, and the grand public edifices which to the sea-ward at once arrest the eye; all give it that bold and splendid aspect which marks a British naval station. . . . The park-like glacis with its noble trees, and cattle on its sloping banks; South-Sea Terrace, the Grand Hospital,[3] the old Semaphore, and a succession of splendid terraces form the most conspicuous objects . . .

'Portsmouth and Portsea are both situated on the island of the latter name . . . and round both towns numerous hamlets are fast extending . . .

'To the eastward of the terraces at Southsea, are situated the squares, streets, and groves, which constitute the new watering-place, called Southsea; there is a noble establishment, comprehending baths of every kind, called "the King's Rooms",[4] and from the top of the colonade is obtained a magnificent view of the sea and harbour . . .

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[1] Opened 1840.
[2] Steam packets for the Isle of Wight at this time left from Quebec Tavern in Bath Square on Point.
[3] Haslar Hospital.
[4] Close to the present Clarence Pier.
[5] On Square Tower, it superseded the first one on Southsea Common. Last used 1847.
[6] Built on Rigging Tower in Dockyard 1833.
[7] Victoria Pier by Sally Port – built 1842.
[8] Opened 1838.
[9] Police Force established in Portsmouth 1836.

'Southsea beach boasts a superiority over any other in the kingdom, for the clear sea-water, and the acknowledged utility which has followed the use of its baths in numerous complaints which bade defiance to medical skill. Great praise is due to the Board of Ordnance, and to the Corporation of the Borough for the improvements, especially in draining, which have rendered Southsea and the vicinity, doubly salubrious, opening delightful promenades in spots where stagnant pools and morasses formerly stood. . . .

'Upon entering the town of Portsmouth from Southsea, we mounted a flight of steps to the inner lines, and soon reached the King's bastion, on which the garrison standard is hoisted, and a gun discharged every morning at daybreak. We next examined the saluting battery on the platform, a place of general resort; affording a prospect of the shipping and boats. It is a magnificent sight to see from this spot, a first rate man-of-war with sails spread, majestically gliding out of the harbour, and catch the pealing echoes of the guns, as they salute the garrison flag . . .

'Not far from this we came to the fine antique Semaphore,[5] now disused, but from which signals were made to vessels in the harbour, and at Spithead, and communications held with the metropolis, within two minutes. The removal of the Port Admiral's establishment to the dockyard has now led to the erection of a new Semaphore[6] to discharge the duties of the one just described, which is nevertheless kept in perfect order, should any occasion arise for its use. . . .

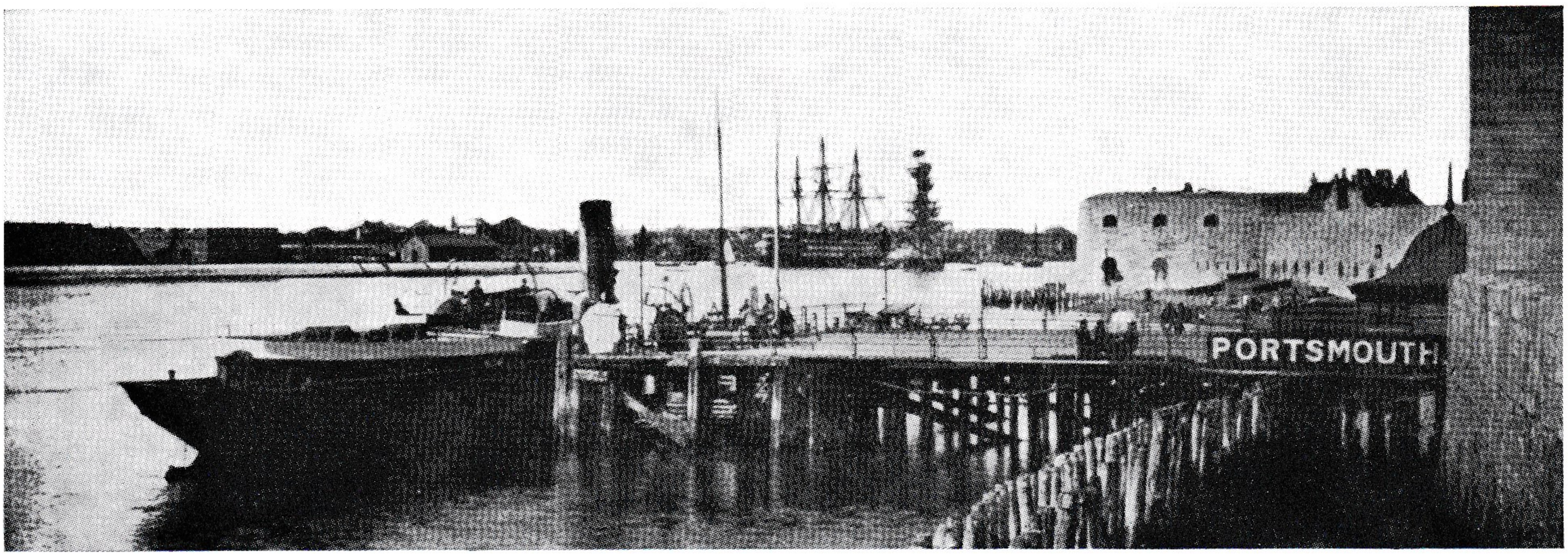
'Contiguous to this interesting edifice is the noble looking pier,[7] built on arches, supported by cast iron pillars; and here you land from or embark in the steam boats and packets, in number surpassing everything we had formed an idea of. . . .

'We were surprised at the splendour of the shops in High Street, as well as the extent and beauty of the street itself, so greatly improved by the removal of the old Market House and Town Hall, which before interrupted the view in the centre. The new Market House on the south side, is a spacious building with a hall and committee rooms over it for the town council and the inhabitants on public occasions.[8] In Pembroke Street adjoining stands the new police with the watch-house.[9] . . .

'At St. James's Gate we entered Broad Street, which extends to the water's edge opposite Gosport. On the left is the Sallyport communicating with the beach, where watermen ply for passengers to Spithead and the Isle of Wight; and here the line of batteries begins. In a small square, near the round tower, we saw the remains of a capstan, originally placed there to raise "the mightee chaine of yren", part of which is still seen at low-water.'

The rest of the description of Point, St. Thomas's Church and the fortifications round Portsea copy Charpentier's *Guide* almost word for word, and if

Victoria Pier, late nineteenth century.



Thomas Roscoe visited all the places he mentions it would have been a considerable achievement, but the next piece is probably genuine.

'Our next Portsmouth trip was a sail round the harbour, one, which no one desirous of seeing the splendid marine views of this citadel of ships, ought to omit. . . . Grand and splendid as this renowned bulwark of England's fame and fortunes upon the deep indisputably is,[1] it is exceeded in point of bulk, weight, and metal, and variety of improvements, recently introduced into our great ships of war, by the dazzling grandeur, and superb beauties of the *British Queen*. In returning from a sail to observe the different points of prospect, it is perfectly safe and easy to mount the side of this magnificent vessel, to visit every department of it, and examine with the utmost care and minuteness the details of her wondrous fabric with all the warlike appointments and treasures she contains.

'Upon our return from this magnificent sight, for a British flag-ship is not an every day object, we paid our compliments to the royal yacht,[2] to the grand gun wharf,[3] and to the dock-yard. No foreigner can be admitted to the latter; the warden's leave must be obtained, and the visitor must apply at ten in the morning or three in the afternoon.'

This very fulsome account is rounded off by giving the very detailed guide-book description of the Dockyard, of Haslar Hospital, and of Gosport and its fortifications, but there is nothing of a personal nature in it.

Only a few years later comes another rather impersonal account written by *J. M. W. Turner* in 1849. Although the railway had only reached Portsmouth two years before, he already takes it for granted, for all he says is, 'in twenty minutes after leaving Havant, we reached the station at Portsmouth'. His main interest was in the history of the development of the naval port and its fortifications and into this he goes in great detail, starting with Portchester Castle. He sums it up by saying: 'But it is to the last two Georges, the grandfather and uncle of her Illustrious Majesty, the Queen, and the additions made by William IV and still in progress, that Portsmouth owes its present magnitude. . . . It requires 13,500 men to man the works and forts, and the moats, which are wide and deep, can be filled with water from the sea. . . .

'Portsmouth proper is but a small portion of the Parliamentary Borough, and measures about a mile and a half in circuit, strongly fortified, excepting at the Point, a populous suburb. The ramparts are planted, and used by the inhabitants as an agreeable lounge and promenade, and afford ever varying views of the shipping and surrounding scenery. There are four gateways, the principal one, Landport, being of Rustic work, to my taste a sad innovation in architectural decoration, for in all buildings of classical antiquity, this rough stone work was originally concealed from view, being either unfinished portions of the building, or intended to be hidden by sculpture or bronze. Point-gate, of the Corinthian order, was designed by Inigo Jones, in the reign of Charles II . . .

'Portsea, immediately to the north of Portsmouth, is likewise completely fortified, the walls extending from the Harbour, on the north, to the Mill Dam, on the south. The Lion and the Unicorn Gateways are stern piles of architecture, displaying in the entablatures above the gate, in the one instance, the Lion, and in the other, the Unicorn of the Royal Arms. . . . Within the immediate fortifications is the Dock-yard, covering no less than 120 acres. It has a dwarf wall along the harbour for about three-quarters of a mile, and on the land side is separated from the town by a wall fourteen feet high.'

Turner's description of the Dockyard is remarkably short compared with those of most other writers. By contrast he is far more interested in churches and makes some reference to all then within the borough boundaries.

Of the new suburbs he says briefly:

'Landport, to the east of Portsea, was formerly only a public house, situated about half-way between the Parish Church and the houses on the Common. Portsmouth Common has become Portsea, and Half-way Houses the flourishing district of Landport. . . .

'Southsea, to the east of Portsmouth, adjoins Landport to the north. Its beautiful terraces and villas have mostly risen up since the close of the late war with France. Fronting the ramparts of Portsmouth, though at a considerable distance,

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[1] The reference is to *Victory*.
[2] Probably the *Royal George*. The new *Victoria and Albert* was launched at Pembroke Dock 1843.
[3] Now H.M.S. *Vernon*.

are Hampshire, Landport, King's, Jubilee, and Bellevue Terraces. On the beach is an extensive bathing establishment called the King's Rooms, with warm, cold and medicated baths, Promenade and Assembly rooms.'

To sum it up he says:

'The island, the greater portion of which is occupied by Market-gardens, in its circumference of sixteen miles, has three sides open to the sea, the south to Spithead, the east to Langston Harbour, and the west to Portsmouth Harbour, and is separated from the main land by a narrow channel, at the north, over which are two bridges, secured by a triple entrenchment, the one for ingress and the other for egress of passengers.'

Yet it is the floating bridge 'which plies across the harbour, between Portsmouth and Gosport every fifteen minutes' which fascinated him most.

'The Floating-bridge consists of a large flat-bottomed boat, similar to the busses of the middle ages. The deck is covered with road-stuff, so that carriages drive on board, the same as if it were a continuation of the road itself. This massive vessel plies between two chains, stretched parallel to each other, from one shore to the other. On each side of the vessel are three wheels, that in the centre being of a large diameter. The chains are conducted over the large and under the small wheels, the links fitting into notched grooves on their surface. The large wheel is propelled by steam; the use of the small wheels is to keep the floating mass steady. When the bridge is at either side, the chain, of course, sinks to the bottom, and offers no bar to navigation. Besides standing for carriages and horses, the bridge has a commodious room for the accommodation of passengers. A similar bridge is at Southampton, and another propelled by manual labour, instead of steam, crosses the Arun, at Little Hampton.'

Finally after a complete tour of Gosport in which he conjectured at length about the origin of the name of the place, he crossed by steam packet from the Victoria Pier to the Isle of Wight.

It is unfortunate that it has not been found possible at present to locate material relating to Portsmouth in the middle years of the last century with the exception of a diary written on the eve of the outbreak of the Crimean War. As this has been used in another Paper, it is not repeated here.[1]

It is not till we come to the journal of *Beatrix Potter* that the thread is again taken up. Beatrix Potter, the writer of children's stories, wrote her journal in code and only in recent years has this code been broken. She came on a brief visit to Portsmouth with her parents in November 1884, when she was a young lady of 18, and gives quite the most lively account of anyone of the naval ships in the harbour. The family travelled from Eastbourne by train and on her way she comments:

'The Forts round Portsmouth struck me as being very low, which is said to be conductive to strength.[2] It is a singular thing that Portsmouth is the only English town which is strongly fortified.

'On leaving the Station I was first struck by the poorness of the streets, the quantity of timber yards, and tricycles and the scarcity of soldiers and sailors, however, the last have become plentiful.

'After wanderings in a Fly we finally settled at the Queens Hotel[3] which seems comfortable, a queer old house with mountainous floors. An ironclad is anchored opposite, and this evening the electric light[4] has been dodging off it round the coast, the sea, and the sky, in a most erratic manner.

'Went in the afternoon to a landing place[5] whence we saw the old warships *St. Vincent*, *Victory*, and *Duke of Wellington* at anchor in the middle of the channel. They look immense and very picturesque, which I should think they are not, to judge by the one opposite, though it is a great size; but there is a most odious mist hiding everything. How easy they must have been to hit! . . .

'In the High Street was a charming bird-shop where they had a most incredible number of dormice in two cages. I don't believe they were dormice, too large by three or four sizes. Am considering how it would be possible to convey some home. Only saw one curiosity-shop with only old china, which is very interesting and to my taste, but not my purse.

'Wonder why that bust of Charles I put up on his return from his Spanish courting has never been broken.[6] . . .

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[1] Portsmouth Paper 19: *Portsmouth and the Crimean War*.
[2] Palmerston's Forts on Portsdown.
[3] On site of present hotel of that name. This one burnt down in 1901.
[4] Assumed to be some early type of searchlight.
[5] Possibly Point.
[6] On Square Tower.

'Signs of a little wooden midshipman and Red Indian (tobacco), dirty old back-streets, suggestive of the press-gang. Extraordinary boxes for carrying admiral's cocked-hats, also several shops with curious musical instruments. Quite a flourishing Unitarian Chapel abounding in tombstones opposite the house where Buckingham was murdered.

'Quantity of convicts working, several warders on wooden platforms with guns. Scotch soldiers and men of war men, very strong and serviceable looking, much sturdier looking and more sensibly dressed than the soldiers, except perhaps the Highlanders.

'Tuesday, November 11th. – Still misty unfortunately, but no rain. Morning, went by tram and, after several changes and considerable amusement from the company, we reached the Docks.

'While still a considerable distance from the stopping place the tram-steps were lowered by a most determined-looking, short, broad, close-shaven seafaring party with an oily black curl twisted over each ear, who planted himself on the steps, whence he looked down on his numerous fellows in the street with the contemptuous air of a man who has made a conquest.

'I saw we were in for it, and, before we descended, papa had capitulated to the seafaring gentleman who marched us along the pier across the railway,[1] facing round every few steps to see that his prey had not escaped.

'At the pier-end was a broad, yellow-whiskered man, who, in obedience to the mute and mysterious signs of his superior delivered at about $\frac{1}{4}$ mile distance, had brought round a large old boat resembling a tub, into which we were put as prisoners, not without difficulty owing to the swell from two or three of the small steamers and tugs which seem positively to swarm here.

'I didn't care tuppence for the water, but I was oppressed by the doubt of how the men-of-war were to be mounted, having completely forgotten the stairs, of which I must have seen drawings.

'When once we were fairly captured the naval gentleman suddenly relented and became very communicative, and took us a very pleasant row to the *Victory*. I think this ship was one of the most picturesque sights imaginable, particularly from close under the stairs – looking up at the queer little port-holes, and the end like a quaint carved old house. . . .

'We went on the fighting deck, an extraordinary long deck. . . . Its decks were very clean and roomy, with very few coils of rope or furniture of any kind to cumber them. The cracks between the floor boards were filled with pitch. The low beams, supports and sides were whitewashed, and very steep oak steps in the middle of the ship led from one deck to another.

'On the top deck was the spot where Nelson fell, the barge which brought his body to London and several of the original twenty-four pounders, and some old flint guns and a curious case for carrying bullets. Only four of the original cannon are on board, as all the rest were thrown overboard to lighten the ship after the battle, as she was partially full of water.

'Down below we saw the original fore-topsail torn, with big holes. I thought the most interesting place was a very low deck above the hold, which would be below the water if the ship was in action. At each side of the deck were railed enclosures which I took for loose boxes, but which were cabins. To one of these Lord Nelson was carried, and died with his head against a beam.

'There was a poor portrait of him on deck, and a very good picture in the officer's cabin, painted by one Mr. Davis, one of the ship's officers. I was surprised to find that the only personal relics preserved there were two letters, one written before he lost his right hand, the other afterwards. We were shown over by a Marine.

'The *Victory*'s anchor is near Southsea pier[2], on the beach. There is a very handsome Russian bell taken from a convent at Kerch[3] on one of the decks.

'We next rowed up the harbour, which looked immense although the tide was out, under the figure-head of the *Duke of Wellington*, which is a larger ship than the *Victory*. The figure-head weighs three or four tons. Though not nearly so old, she is utterly unseaworthy, having been built in a hurry of unseasoned timber for the Russian war. She was a steamer but her machines are removed. There is hardly any of the old *Victory* left, she has been so patched.

'Then we passed the little *Ant* used as a training ship for boys. Then a row of old hulks without masts, some are used to store coal and are awfully grimy, but others are painted yellow, and the man-of-war crews live in them while their ships are in the

[1] Pier by Harbour Station.
[2] Now known as Clarence Pier.
[3] In the Crimea.

View of the Hard from the Harbour Station, late nineteenth century.

docks. Among the latter was the old *Bellerophon* which was in Trafalgar and also conveyed Napoleon to St. Helena.

'Then we approached the Royal Yacht *Osborne*, and the *Sunbeam*, and the ironclad *Glatton*. The sailors of the latter were just going off in a long boat to dinner on the *Excellent*, so there were hardly any on board. A very pleasant intelligent sailor took us all over except the engine room, where we did not venture.

'The *Glatton* is old for an ironclad, twelve years. It goes out for a few miles for target practice, but is not seaworthy, being too low in the water. We examined the revolving turret; very strongly plated, and with two guns which looked immense, but are comparatively small and not breech-loaders. We went below and saw how the turret worked . . .

'There was a nice little steam launch on the deck of the *Glatton*, and a large sailing boat. . . .

'The most striking thing about the ship was its cleanness and its compactness, not an inch of space was lost or to spare.

'We got into our boat again and looked at Portchester Castle, the fortifications on the top of the hill, whence they can shoot eight miles right over the harbour; and the mud flats where they practise at canvas targets when the tide is up, because then the balls bounce on the waters and do not pierce the mud. They are found by men who have special Licence to search, and receive a farthing a pound.

'Torpedo practice was going on at the top of the harbour. We did not hear much noise, but the water dashed up.

'Going back down the left, past the wharves, we saw the *Excellent* in the docks, but decided not to go there till tomorrow, to which the seafaring gentleman was reconciled after he had discovered we were inclined to submit to his guidance on that occasion also.

'Next we passed the *Hecla*, a torpedo ship with little torpedo-boats on deck. She is a beautifully shaped vessel capable of doing 21 miles an hour. We saw two torpedos through holes, and several Gatling guns.[1] . . . Next we passed . . . the *Assistance*, a fine troop-ship, but not protected in any way, built of sheet iron as was also the *Hecla*.

'She is just going to take troops to a place called Skye, as our conductor informed us, which, as he added after a little discussion with his friend, is a place in Scotland. . . .

'Then we passed several tugs, large vessels, the *Grinder* and the *Seahorse*, which did good service in Egypt. There were no end of small steamers rushing about . . . The seafaring gentleman landed us safely after inflicting a fine of five shillings, and intimating that we must be there at 10.30 to see the drill, and that he would watch for the tram. We had a most interesting morning.

'Again looked upon those dormice. Would they carry in a biscuit canister? They are grievously afflicted with tickles. Bought some coins at a jeweller's, it was mamma's doing. I would never buy them at a jeweller's, even with my relation's money. It greatly detracts from the enjoyment of a purchase if you have paid an exorbitant price.

'Went along the beach in the afternoon. Southsea Castle is very strong, but why so unprotected on the land?

'Wednesday, November 12th. – Wednesday morning we again set off in the tram, and were duly captured by the nautical gentleman who was more condescending, but took it out in a still larger exaction.

'Port smoother than ever, though sometimes too rough for small boats, but unfortunately the same fog. Rowed up towards the *Excellent*, passing on the way a ship which we had seen coming in during the morning, the *Poonah*, a troop-ship hired by the Government, having white officers and a black crew.

'I never saw such an immense ship, we seemed

[1] A machine-gun invented in 1861 by Richard Jordan Gatling.

as if we should never get to the other end. There was a fat brown-man in a white nightgown and turban. The ship was of a most elegant shape, but as the seaman remarked, she looked as if she would roll a great deal.

'The sailors were doing something to the ropes of the *Seahorse*, swarming up and down with their bare feet, and hanging on like monkeys. We could see the top of the *Euphrates* lying in the docks.

'We got up on board the *Excellent* which was beautifully clean as usual, and a striking contrast to the two other ships, being full of sailors. What funny people they are, like children, tumbling over one another singing, and one playing gravely with the ship's cat. Fine handsome men, and very civil. They were just beginning ten minutes for lunch, and as we went up some steps we were nearly run over by some twenty or thirty tearing along. I would think sailors never have sorrows, I did not see a single grave one.

'The first thing to look at was the big tub for grog, we also saw the cooking and mess-rooms and store-place, all of which seem very well regulated, also the ship's tailor with his sewing machine, and the ropes in the course of twisting by an ingenious machine.

'We crossed by a gangway to the second ship, the *Calcutta*, which is included in the title *Excellent*, and considered as the same ship. We had a very civil and intelligent guide who explained everything, and showed how the guns worked. . . .

'The sailors were being taught to work the big guns on two decks. On the upper the guns worked most ingeniously on runners, but the older ones had to be pulled round with ropes amid great confusion and tumbling. The teachers were very sharp, and kept the men always on the move.

'One gunner made a mistake and was reproved at full length. The class became suddenly serious, and the head delinquent looked as if he was going to cry. They fired some caps, which made quite sufficient noise to be agreeable.

Came home Wednesday 12th.'

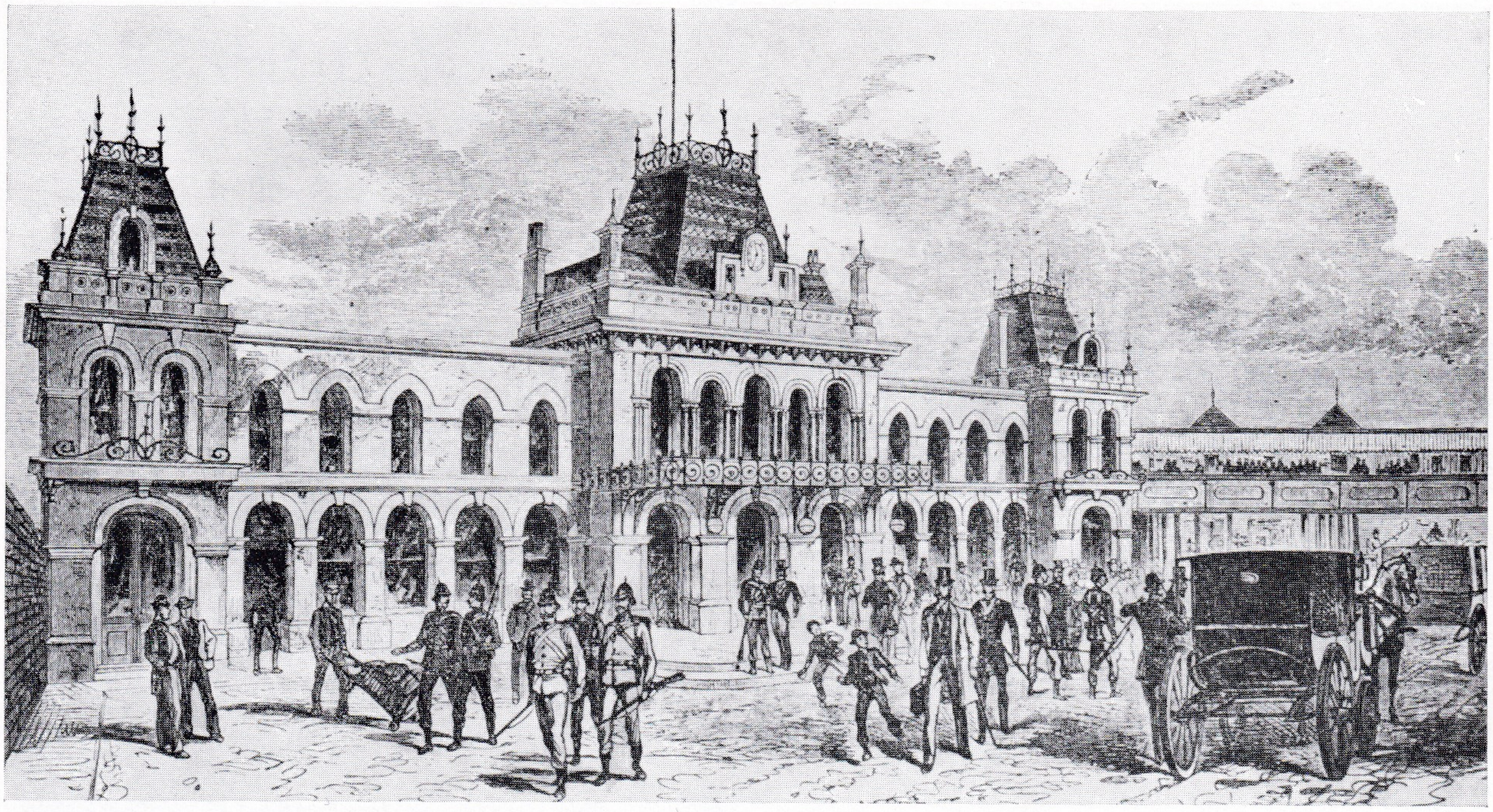
It is a pity that Miss Potter did not say more about the town itself.

In the next fifteen years some accounts of royal occasions by the principal participants have been made available for publication. This is particularly so in the case of Queen Victoria, who visited Portsmouth on a number of occasions throughout her reign especially to see the Navy. However, extracts from her *Journal* have not been included here, partly because she was always far more interested in individuals than places, and partly because the details she gives, perhaps inevitably, deal more with the function she is attending than the town and its people in particular.

Finally, perhaps the last extract should be this by *Clement Scott* who about 1897 spent a summer holiday on Hayling Island. It was wet.

'I had been in prison on our island for many sad and desolate days. Not a vestige of blue sky by day, or a golden star by night. . . . The Isle of Wight was completely blotted out. Spithead and its forts were in tears. The Warner light could not flash through the grey gloom, and after dinner, pacing the conservatory of the "Bungalow Yacht", it was impossible for three long imprisoned evenings to see the welcome illumination on Southsea Pier. Our only consolation was to be told that the island wanted the rain very badly. Well, the island had got enough of it now, in all conscience . . . After the rain the mushrooms appear to have had a gay time of it . . . and, from all accounts, the mushroom crop on our salt sea common will be able to dispute authority with the potsherds, broken bottles, and lost golf balls of which we invariably have a very plentiful harvest. For this is all that excursionists do on our deserted island. They come in wagons to have cock-shies at bottles of every shape and size, in order to torture, madden, and lacerate the bathers from the beach; and they lose golf balls by the dozen among the shingle and blackberry-bushes, to the huge satisfaction of the lynx-eyed "caddies", who get paid handsomely for lost balls when recovered. . . . Today shouting and merriment were heard in abundance on the island, and, of course, it was the very day after the rain to go to Southsea Regatta. If Southsea has one peculiarity it has that of smartness. . . .

'The girls are all neat, trim, and taut. They are, half of them, the daughters or relations of retired army and navy men, and they would not have a ribbon or a buckle out of place for the world. All the girls at Southsea appear to be under the eye of the commanding officer, and always "at attention". It is the headquarters of primness and pipeclay. . . . Southsea also has its common, with common rights and people's privileges, of which Southsea is commendably jealous. You can gallop if you like over Southsea common . . . and you can get as fine a blow on the sea-front as anyone would desire, for



Portsmouth Town Railway Station, late nineteenth century.

does not Southsea boast a sea-wall, embankment, and promenade all round and about the old castle, a sea-front and esplanade nearly as fine as that at Eastbourne? . . .

'There is only one brief interval of War Office land at Eastney Barracks[1] and fortifications that would prevent the continuation of this sea-wall from the Clarence Pier, Southsea, to North Hayling . . .

'Yes, I will try a new way to get to Southsea this time. That illuminated pier every night has only seemed a stone's throw from the "Bungalow", and still it has been necessary to go by road, a long way round, or rail, with two changes, before arriving at the delightful Southsea embankment of sea-wall.

'So this time I will go on foot across the island, among the golfers and the blackberries which grow in profusion on our island. If you pause for the gathering of a handful, you must be on your guard lest your head is taken off with a lifting stroke, for the links don't end until close at the edge of the water by Hayling Ferry.

'It is a romantic spot, this Hayling Ferry . . . It is only a very few hundred yards across from Hayling to Eastney, and yet the work of uniting has never yet been accomplished by bridge or American cargo boat. On the Hayling side is a little cottage and a little primitive inn, where the sailors going into the harbour congregate and drink good ale. On the Eastney side is another little cottage, surrounded with the "harvest of the sea", bits of anchors, hoops of barrels, old casks, wood, wreckage, enough old iron to stock a store, all cast up by the sea, and seemingly stacked here for years and years. I am told that this same Hayling Ferry has been in the same family for a generation, and on it goes, backwards and forwards, a long pull here, a strong pull there, with youth on one side of the ferry and old age on the other, just as it has done these hundreds of years. It is a bleak, wild, but not unfascinating spot. I have seen it in all weathers and all seasons, in mid-winter and in mid-summer; and I like to sit down with "Jack" on the ale-house bench, as the wind whistles about our ears, and the peewits cry, and the sand-martins chase after the flies, and wonder whether the uniting of Hayling to the mainland will ever take place. But the exhilarating walk is not nearly finished. I have left the blackberry bushes and sandhills, and sea-daisies behind me, and now I am in the midst of targets and forts, and cannons and red flags, and sentry-boxes, and all the grim detail of the most modern of fortifications.[2] But a short detour takes me to the very end of the Southsea embankment, and then my course is straight, briny, and breezy, right away to the Clarence Pier, where all day long, with never-ending interest, they watch the steamers going to and returning from the Isle of Wight; they delight in the white-winged yachts that skim in and out of Portsmouth Harbour; they talk, and smoke, and eat chocolate, and flirt; they invest innumerable pence on the automatic boxes . . .

'But there is something more to be seen on the Clarence Pier, afternoon and evening, than the harmless nonsense of the seaside. Here come popular artists from London to sing at first-class concerts,

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[1] Esplanade at this date ended at St. George's Road, Eastney. The extension past the Eastney Barracks was not made till 1921.

[2] Fort Cumberland.

Typical scene on Southsea beach showing memorials near the Clarence Pier.

and here may be heard the magnificent string band of the Royal Marine Artillery. In fact, Southsea boasts two piers, one at the Eastney end, and one at the Portsmouth end, and both piers are devoted to good music and automatic machines. Between the piers is a kind of mutual Campo Santo, facing the sea, where they erect monuments, tombstones, and cenotaphs to distinguished men beloved of Southsea and its immediate district. It is a strange fancy to mix up boats and bathing-machines, restaurants and lollypops, with seaside tombstones and granite memorials; but I do not think it is an inappropriate place for such humble and affectionate memorials of good men and great deeds of the deep.

'Municipally considered, I don't suppose that there are two smarter sea-coast places in the south than Southsea and Portsmouth. Everything for the public service, such as cabs and lighting and good roads and order, is admirably managed at both places; but I very much doubt if "old salts" would recognise the Portsmouth of Charles Dickens and Captain Marryat . . . in the new, smart, red-bricked Portsmouth, with its magnificent barracks, park, and recreation grounds, its imposing town hall – one of the finest in the kingdom – in the Portsmouth up-to-date, which only requires a new railway station to make it perfect.[1]

However today nearly 80 years later, although much reconstruction has taken place, Portsmouth is still waiting for its new railway station and Southsea still likes to think of itself as being apart from and not a part of Portsmouth.

[1] The Town Station referred to was built 1866.

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